

## CHAPTER 3.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### 3.1 Description of the Proposed Project

The proposed project consists of subdividing a 127-acre parcel located within Planning Area 10 of the Coto de Caza Specific Plan into six (6) open space lots and seven (7) rural residential estate lots, together with the existing recorded access road (Lot "C, which encompasses approximately three acres). The proposed subdivision is illustrated in Exhibit 3-1 (Conceptual Site Plan). As indicated in that conceptual illustration, an access road and utilities to serve the estate lots are also proposed to be extended from Van Gogh Way off-site and west of the property to the proposed rural residential estate lots. Building pads within each estate lot would be created; however, the completion of homes and appurtenant facilities would occur incrementally on a lot-by-lot basis. Mitigation to offset habitat losses resulting from the construction of the access road, building pads and anticipated future fuel modification/brush management areas surrounding each home site will occur within designated areas within open space Lots A and B (refer to Exhibit 4.3-5). The remaining open space lots (i.e., Lots C through F on Exhibit 4.3-5) will be made available as "mitigation parcels" to off-set habitat impacts resulting from other projects, either through the formal establishment of a "mitigation bank" or on a less formal "ad hoc" basis. Regardless of when future mitigation transactions occur, all open space lots shall be preserved as open space in perpetuity as part of the project.

Although the 7 rural residential estate lots will vary in size from approximately 2.01 (Lot 4) acres to 9.24 acres (Lot 7), grading will be limited to the creation of the building pads, access roadway, and the fuel modification areas. Pad sizes will vary from 19,930 square feet (Lot 3) to 38,170 square feet (Lot 7) as presented in Table 3-1. Table 3-1 provides a summary of the lot configurations.

**Table 3-1**  
**Preliminary Lot Configuration**  
**Coto de Caza Specific Plan Amendment**

<b>Lot</b>	<b>Pad Size (Square Feet)</b>	<b>Lot Size (Acres)</b>
1	23,700	2.65
2	23,440	2.22
3	19,930	2.61
4	34,620	2.01
5	25,640	2.18
6	22,490	6.00
7	38,170	9.24
Streets		1.39
<b>Total Area</b>		<b>28.3</b>
SOURCE: CSL Engineering, Inc. (Tentative Tract Map 17325)		

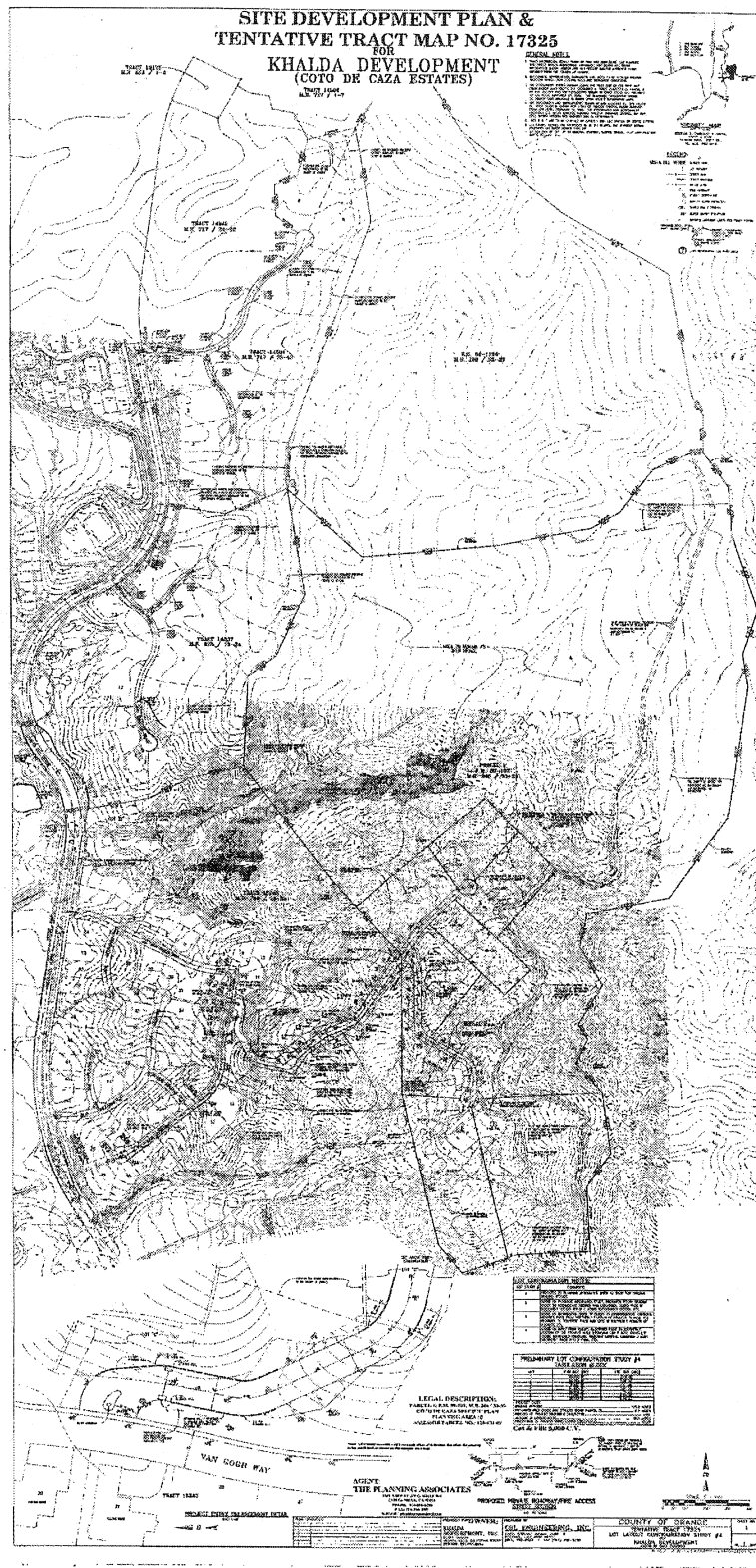




## Exhibit 3-1 Conceptual Site Plan







**Exhibit 3-2**  
**Tentative Tract Map 17325**

Under the adopted Coto de Caza Specific Plan, a total of up to 6,268 dwelling units was approved; however, only 4,937 homes have been built to date. Planning Area (PA) 10, where the property is situated, was approved for up to 197 dwelling units; only 188 homes have been built. Consequently the 7 rural residential estate lots proposed by the applicant fall within the maximum development limit approved by the County and do not require an increase to the total number of units for either PA 10 or the overall Specific Plan. In addition, the specific plan allocated a minimum of 378 acres of open space in PA 10. At the present time the planning area contains 459.71 acres of open space. After development of the subject property as proposed, PA 10 would contain 434.2 acres of open space, or approximately 56.2 acres more than the minimum required by the Coto de Caza Specific Plan.

Nonetheless, the proposed project requires an amendment to the Coto de Caza Specific Plan to change the type of development authorized on the parcel from open space and/or recreational to rural residential and to delineate specifically which areas within the parcel are to remain undeveloped (the present designation limits the total amount of development that can occur within the parcel but does not delineate where development/preservation is to occur).<sup>1</sup> In addition, whereas the current Specific Plan designation and development criteria for the Open Space Areas allow for a maximum of 15 percent (19 acres of the 127 acre site) to be developed with “impervious surfaces” (i.e., roads, driveways, rooftops and hardscape areas) and no limits are placed on how much acreage could be subject to grading or clearing,<sup>2</sup> the proposed revision will limit the amount of impervious surfaces to approximately 9.8 acres (7.5 percent) and the total acreage subject to grading/clearing to approximately 15 acres (11.5 percent).

In addition to the 7 rural residential estate lots and extension of the access road and utilities, the applicant is also proposing a project design feature that includes the dedication of 26.5 acres of coastal sage habitat on-site in nearby areas (Lot A) as compensation for the areas impacted by the grading necessary to extend the access road and to prepare the building pads for the proposed single-family residential development. An additional 19.9 acres of coastal sage habitat in Lot B will also be offered to the County for dedication in anticipation of future Section 7 and Section 404 requirements.

As indicated above, in order to ensure that potentially significant impacts to the coastal sage scrub habitat are avoided, the proposed project includes the advance offer of dedication of 26.5 acres in lettered Lot A of coastal sage scrub habitat prior to the issuance of a grading permit. No grading or development within TTM 17325 would be permitted until the offered dedication of coastal sage scrub habitat has been made and accepted prior to any ground disturbance associated with the development of the proposed residential dwelling units and access road.

Project implementation will necessitate the approval of following discretionary actions by the Orange County elected or appointed bodies as follows:

1. Specific Plan Amendment (map change only; no text change is required) – Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors
2. Subdivision Map (TTM 17325) – Subdivision Committee
3. Area Plan – Planning Commission
4. Amendment to an existing Grant of Easement for Parcel Map 89-107 – Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors

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<sup>1</sup>Chapter 3, Section 2 (Open Space Regulations; Coto de Caza Specific Plan, Amendment No. 3; August 8, 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Id.

Other ministerial actions for grading permit(s), improvement plans, record maps and easement recordations will occur as routine actions following the orderly approval of the entitlements described above.

Concurrently with the actions described above, there will be coordination with several Resource and Regulatory Agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), California Department of Fish & Game (CDFG), California Regional Water Quality Control Board (CRWQCB), and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), who act as responsible agencies related to permit approvals required prior to implementation of the proposed project. Pre-application filings will occur with the Resource and Regulatory Agencies that have jurisdiction over certain areas of the project.

The project has been designed to avoid to the maximum extent practicable jurisdictional (waters) areas of the ACOE, CDFG, and RWQCB; however, the proposed project will be subject to each of the responsible agencies' independent permit process. With regard to the USFWS and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the County of Orange is a party to the Implementation Agreement that identifies Coto de Caza (among other properties) as a candidate for Habitat Reserve dedication. In that regard, the County of Orange, the applicant, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are working together to finalize the specific Habitat Reserve enrollment areas for the subject 127-acre property concurrent with the entitlement processing of the subject property.

## **3.2 Project Location**

### **Regional Location**

The subject property is located within the 4,929-acre Coto de Caza community in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains in the southeastern limits of unincorporated Orange County (refer to Exhibit 3-3). Coto de Caza is situated south of the City of Rancho Santa Margarita and north of San Juan Capistrano. Coto de Caza and the subject property are located approximately 7 miles east of the San Diego Freeway (I-5). Access to the site from the I-5 Freeway to the west is provided via Oso Parkway. Access from the I-5 Freeway from the south is also provided from Oso Parkway via Antonia Parkway and Ortega Highway. Cañada Gobernadora is located east of the site.

### **Project Vicinity**

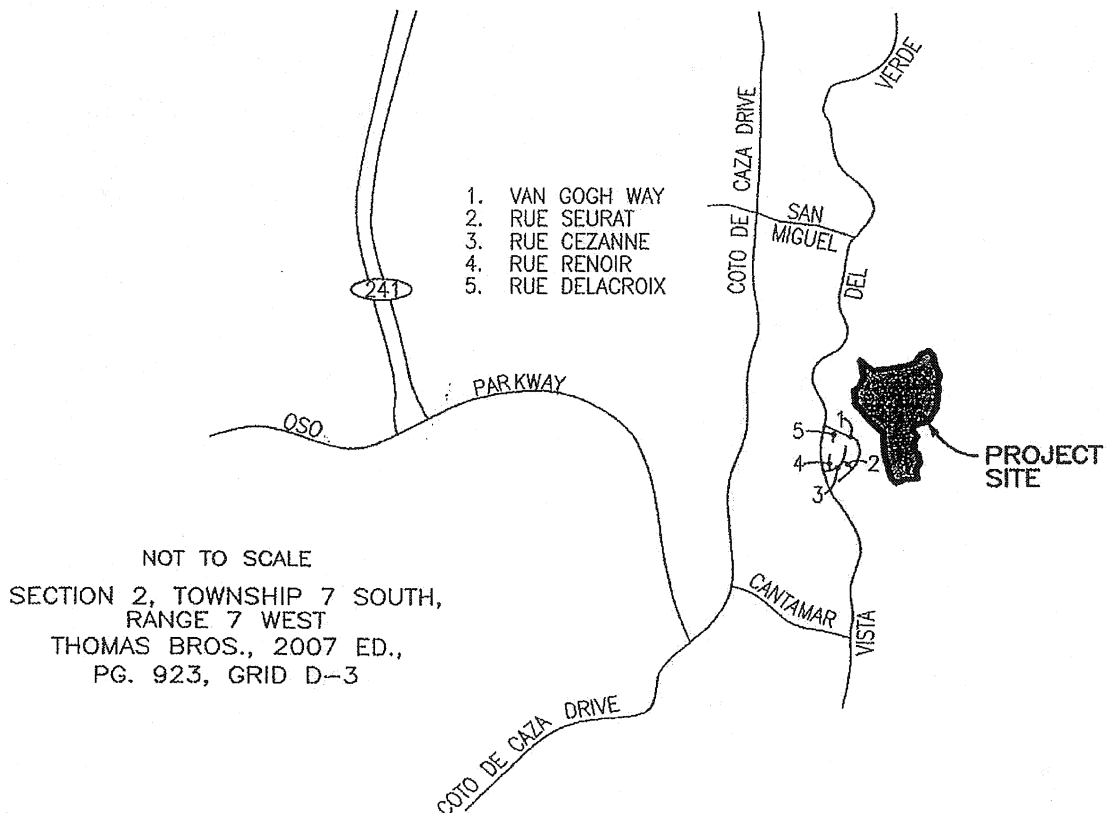
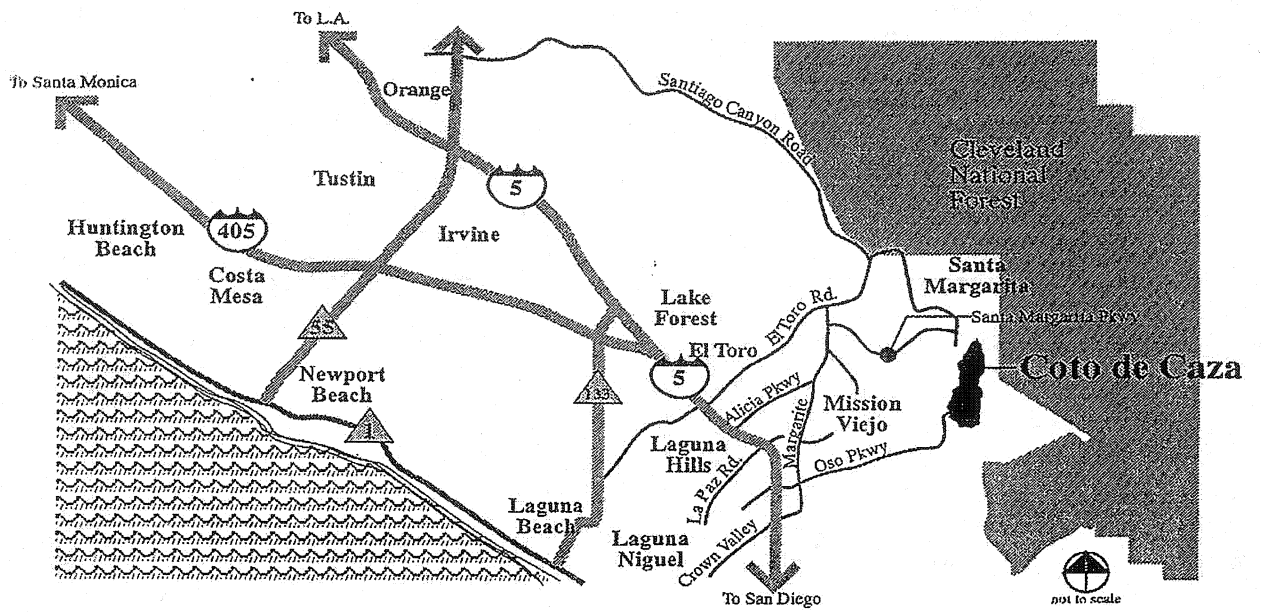
The subject property encompasses approximately 126.51 acres east of Van Gogh Way and the residential development in Tract 15245. The project site is located in Sections 1 and 2, Township 7 South, Ranch 7 West (San Bernardino Base and Meridian) within the Cañada Gobernadora 7.5-minute U.S. Geological Survey quadrangle.

## **3.3 Environmental Setting**

### **3.3.1 Existing Land Use**

#### **Project Site**

The subject property is currently undeveloped. The site is characterized by moderate to steeply sloping topography, including valleys and drainage swales. Although undeveloped, the site has been altered by human activities, including off-road vehicular use, trails, easements, and prior cattle and agricultural use areas. Several dirt roads also extend through the project site, which has affected the existing plant and animal habitat. Exhibit 3-4 (Aerial Photograph) illustrates the subject property and the existing site characteristics.



**Exhibit 3-3**  
**Regional/Vicinity Location**



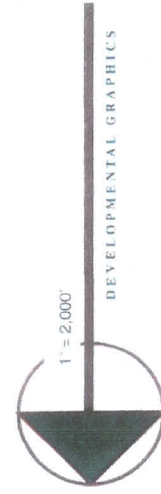


Exhibit 3-4  
Aerial Photograph



### Surrounding Land Uses

The subject property is located east of existing single-family residential development within Tract 15245 along Van Gogh Way. Single-family residential development also exists to the northwest (Tract 14337) and to the southwest in Tract 15327. Open space is located north and south of the proposed project site; the Audubon Preserve and portions of Caspers Regional Park are located to the east (refer to Exhibit 3-4).

### **3.3.2 Existing General Plan**

The 126.51-acre property is in an area of the Coto de Caza Specific Plan that is designated 1B (Suburban Residential) on the Orange County General Plan. The Suburban Residential land use designation allows for densities that range from 0.5 dwelling units/acre to dwelling 18.0 dwelling units per acre.

### **3.3.3 Existing Zoning**

The subject property, like the remainder of the Coto de Caza community, is zoned “Specific Plan.” Within the Specific Plan, the area is located within PA 10 and is designated as Rural Residential on the Coto de Caza Land Use Plan (Exhibit 4 of the Specific Plan), consistent with the General Plan Designation. The adopted Specific Plan allocates a total of 197 residential dwelling units on 684 acres within PA 10. In addition, 378 acres have been allocated for open space within that planning area, which encompass the subject property. The site is located in an area of PA 10 that is designated “Resource Preservation and Scenic Areas” on Exhibit 7 (Development Plan) and “Scenic Areas” on Exhibit 3 (Major Open Space Areas) of the Coto de Caza Specific Plan. The Open Space development regulations, which regulate development in these areas, prescribe permitted uses, development regulations and site development standards for development within the open space areas. Under the Open Regulations, residential development is currently identified as a prohibited use; however, minor shifts of development of up to 10 percent into an area shown as Major Open Space may be approved by the Subdivision Committee. Exhibit 6 (Master Grading Concept) in the Coto de Caza Specific Plan indicates that the area in which the site is located is designated “Restricted Grading Areas,” which requires more rigorous criteria to ensure that landform alteration within the area is minimized. The Coto de Caza Specific Plan would be amended as illustrated in Exhibit 3-5, Exhibit 3-6, and Exhibit 3-7.

### **3.3.4 Physical Environment**

#### Climate and Air Quality

The project site is located within the South Coast Air Basin (SCAB), a 6,600 square mile area encompassing all of Orange County and the non-desert portions of Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties. A persistent high-pressure area that commonly resides over the eastern Pacific Ocean largely dominates regional meteorology. The distinctive climate of this area is determined primarily by its terrain and geographic location. Local climate is characterized by warm summers, mild winters, infrequent rainfall, moderate daytime onshore breezes, and moderate humidity. Ozone and pollutant concentrations tend to be lower along the coast, where the constant onshore breeze disperses pollutants toward the inland valley of the SCAB and adjacent deserts. However, as a whole, the SCAB fails to meet national standards for several criteria pollutants, including ozone, carbon monoxide and PM<sub>10</sub>, and is classified as a “non-attainment” area for those pollutants.





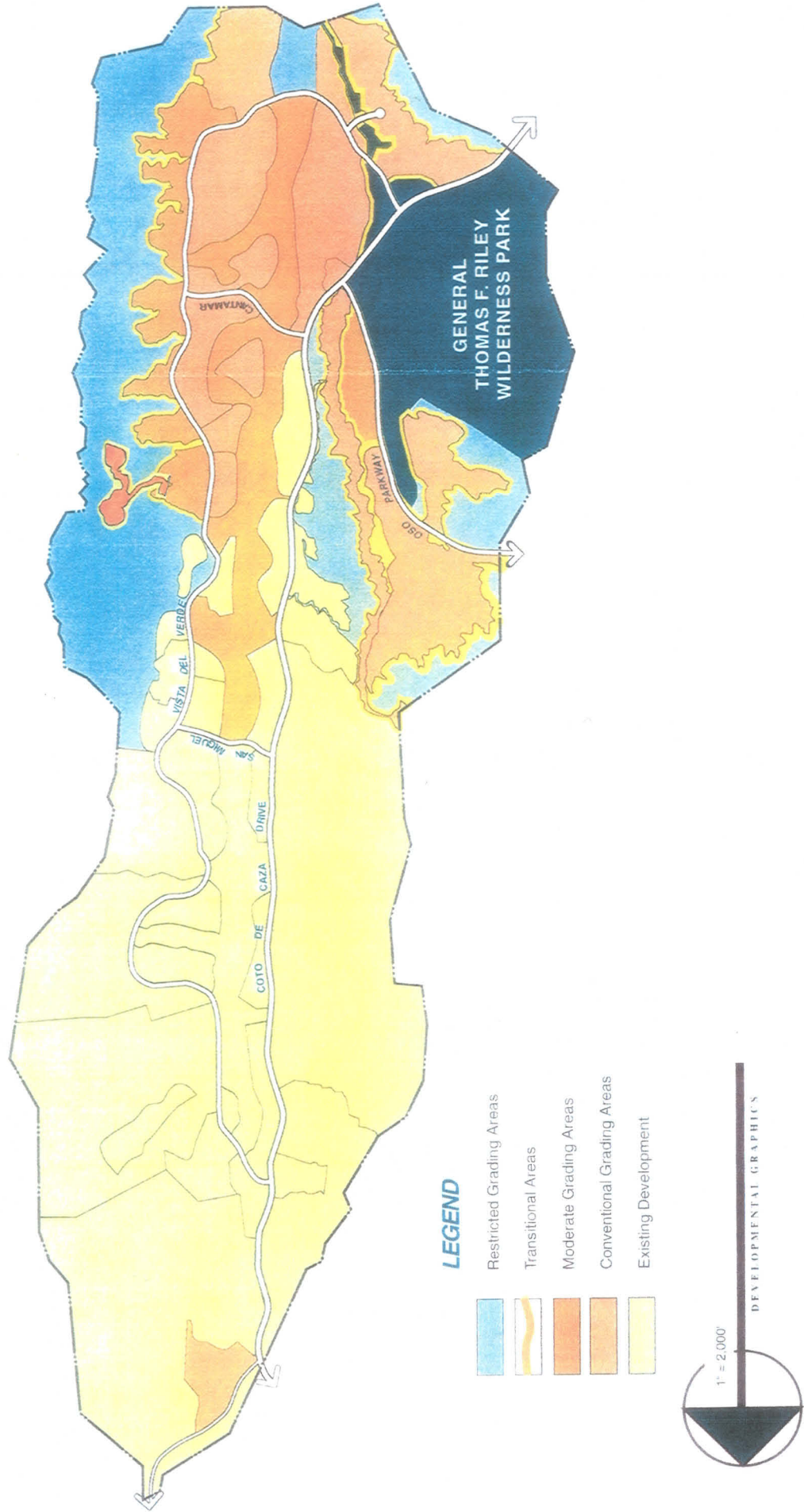
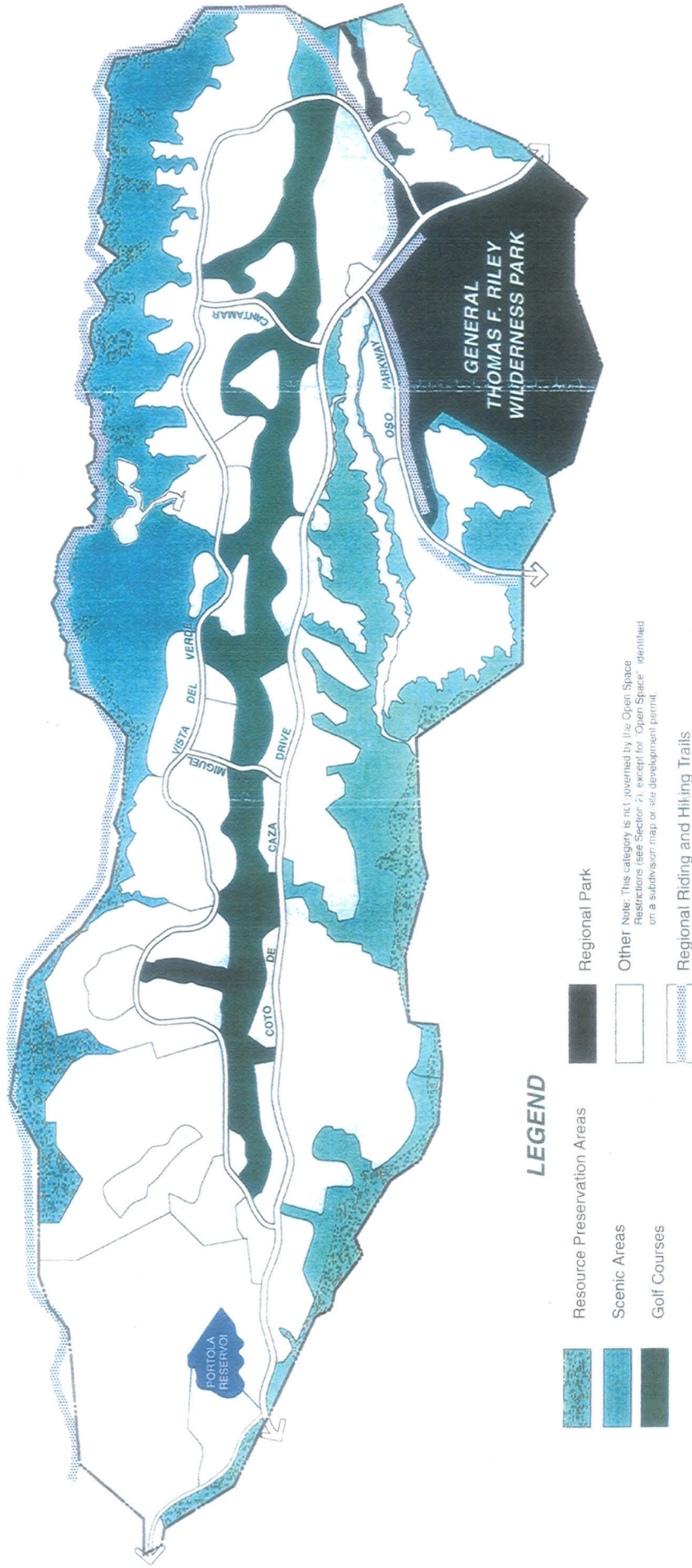


Exhibit 3-5  
Proposed Grading Plan

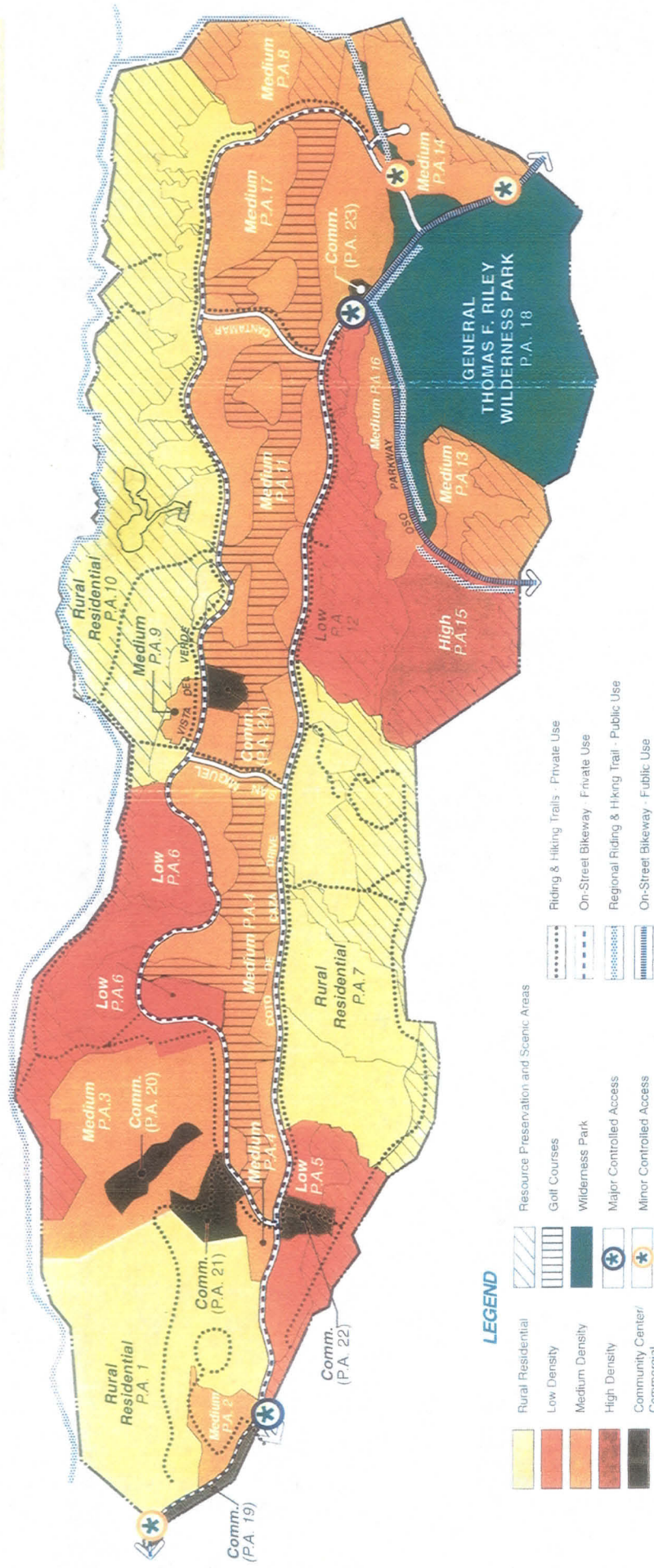






**Exhibit 3-6**  
**Proposed Major Open Space Areas**









### Geology and Seismicity

The site is situated in the northern portion of the Peninsular Ranges Geomorphic Province of Southern California. Northwest-southeast trending structural blocks bound by a series of active, northwester-southeast trending, high angle, right-lateral, strike-slip faults characterize this province. The site is located near the southeastern margin of the Central Block of the Los Angeles Basin, which is bound on the east by the Elsinore Fault, on the north by the Whittier segment of the North-Elsinore Fault, on the southwest by the Newport-Inglewood Fault zone, and on the southeast by the coalescence of the Santa Ana Mountains and the San Joaquin Hills. The subject property is situated on the upper eastern ridgeline of the Cañada Gobernadora, in the unincorporated community of Coto de Caza. Elevations on the site range from approximately 900 feet above mean sea level (amsl) in the northeastern corner of the property to approximately 645 feet amsl in the southwest corner of the property. The natural slopes generally descend toward the southwest from the eastern ridgeline. Most slopes on the site range from 33 percent (i.e., 3:1 horizontal to vertical) to 50 percent (i.e., 2:1 horizontal to vertical).

### Drainage and Hydrology

The project site is located within the drainage area of Cañada Gobernadora, a tributary drainage within the San Juan Creek watershed. San Juan Creek is a 29-mile long stream in southern Orange County that consists of a catchment basin encompassing 133.9 square miles. The Santa Ana Mountains occupy most of the north, east, and south parts of the watershed, while the San Joaquin Hills and one of their small sub-ranges border the watershed on the southwest, east, and northwest. San Juan Creek is considered as part of the 500-square mile San Juan Hydrologic Unit, which is a coastal region extending from central-south Orange County to the north extent of San Diego County. In addition to Cañada Gobernadora, San Juan Creek is comprised of several tributary sub-watershed, all of which drain in a generally southerly direction to join San Juan Creek prior to its discharge into the Pacific Ocean in Dana Point.

The Cañada Gobernadora sub-watershed, which encompasses approximately 11 square miles, originates at the northern boundary of Coto de Caza and extends for a distance of approximately eight miles before joining San Juan Creek above San Juan Capistrano to the south. The Cañada Gobernadora drainage course forms the principal drainage feature of Coto de Caza, extending through the main valley floor as illustrated in Exhibit 3.7 in EIR No. 401. Natural surface flows within the drainages courses on-site are primarily attributed to rainfall and storm runoff during the winter and spring. Due to the presence of numerous springs and seeps, a small amount of surface water is present throughout the year within the Cañada Gobernadora and in some of the larger tributary canyons. Flows within the Cañada Gobernadora are augmented by landscape irrigation runoff from the existing development within the watershed.

As indicated above, the subject property is characterized by moderate to steeply sloping terrain. The site slopes generally from east to west and is drained by several small drainages that extend in a westerly and southwesterly pattern within the natural open space that occupies the site. Existing storm drain facilities are located in the residential development along Van Gogh Way; however,

### Transportation and Circulation

Although Coto de Caza has been developed and supports a hierarchy of roadways throughout the community, direct vehicular access to the site is not available. As previously indicated, the I-5 Freeway is located approximately 7 miles east of the site via Oso Parkway. The freeway is about 8 miles south with access to the site available from Ortega Highway, Antonia Parkway, Oso Parkway, and Coto de Caza Drive. An array of residential streets within the community serves the existing residential neighborhoods. Van Gogh Way is the nearest residential street to the subject property. Access to the 127-acre subject property is provided through the terms of the Grant of Easement (refer to Section 3.4, below).

### Public Services and Utilities

Development within Coto de Caza is served by a full range of public services and utilities. The Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD) is responsible for providing public educational facilities in the in the community, including the subject property. Law enforcement and police services and fire protection services and facilities are provided by the Orange County Sheriff Department and Orange County Fire Authority, respectively. The community receives domestic water service from the Santa Margarita Water District, which is also responsible for providing sewer service to the community via backbone collection and conveyance system. The County also maintains storm drainage collection and conveyance facilities; major flood control facilities are also maintained both by the Orange County Flood Control District. A private waste hauler collects and disposes of the solid waste generated within Coto de Caza, which is collected and transported to one of the three regional landfills operated and maintained by the OC Waste and Recycling. Electrical service in the City is provided by San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) through a grid of transmission lines and related facilities. Natural gas is also provided by SDG&E, which maintains a local system of transmission lines, distribution lines and supply regulation stations. Bell View Regional Riding and Hiking Trail, a County master-planned trail extends through the subject property. This trail begins in Ronald W. Caspers Wilderness Park and continues north, beyond the park, along a ridge that separates Coto de Caza from the Audubon Starr Ranch Sanctuary. The trail accommodates walkers, runners, joggers, hikers, and mountain bicycle and equestrian riders. This trail was opened to the public in March 2000.

### **3.4 History and Evolution of the Project**

The Coto de Caza Specific Plan was approved by the Orange County Board of Supervisors in 1982. The Coto de Caza Specific Plan can be described as a 4,929 acre specific plan with 6,268 approved residential units and 1,581 acres of open space (approximately 33% of the entire specific plan) preserved in a rural residential portion of Canada Gobernadora where the primary riparian spine flows naturally through two golf courses and interconnecting corridors of open space which are connected to two prominent ridgelines whose protected shoulders define and separate Coto de Caza in its own special planned community. Over the past 20 years only 4,937 units have been constructed within Coto de Caza, leaving 1,331 units (more than 20%) not planned to be built. Planning Area 10 (where the proposed project lies) is a 684-acre area, which includes a series of small rural residential neighborhood along the western edge, covers a little less than 14 percent of the community. The adopted Coto de Caza Specific Plan designates Planning Area 10 as both Rural Residential and Open Space (refer to Exhibit 4 and Exhibit 3, respectively, of the Coto de Caza Specific Plan) that encompasses 684 acres, including a maximum of 306 acres of Rural Residential area and a minimum of 378 acres of Open Space as stipulated in Exhibit 8 (Statistical Table) of the Coto de Caza Specific Plan. To date, 188 units of the 197 approved rural residential dwelling units allocated for Planning Area 10 and reflected in the Statistical Table have been constructed. Planning Area 10 presently encompasses 459.71 acres of open space (refer to Table 4.1-2 in Section 4.1 – Land Use and Planning).

In addition to the land uses allocated for PA 10, within the area designated for open space, a Grant of Easement governs the use of the subject 127-acre parcel, known as the “Hunt Club” property, which stipulates the following:

“The Property shall only be used for Open Space” (Scenic Area), “Community Facilities” or any combination of the foregoing. “Community Facilities” permits such uses as: (1) utility buildings for electrical, water, sewage, telephone, etc., (2) community information centers, and (3) recreational facilities. “Recreation Facilities” include facilities with primary uses being recreation of any type including, without limitation golf, equestrian,

hunting-related facilities, a hunt lodge, lounge, office space, kitchen and dining room facility, shooting fields, dog training facility with dog training lake, duck tower and shooting field, crazy quail facility and shooting field, lakes, ponds, retaining walls, parking facilities, access roads and other ancillary structures and improvements in connection herewith. Such uses of the Property shall include the right to develop, construct (including, without limitation, grade, excavate, recompact, fill, irrigate and landscape the property), improve, reconstruct, renew, replace, remove, inspect, maintain, and repair the Property and all ancillary facilities and structures in connection therewith. Such rights shall include the right of Grantor, its agents, employees, guests and invitees to enter upon, pass and repass over and along the Property for purposes of conducting the foregoing activities. Any improvements to the Property shall be constructed in accordance with site Development Permits, plans, specifications and other necessary permits either submitted to or previously approved by Grantee.

“Development of structures on the Property shall be restricted to fifteen percent (15%) of the Property area and may include open fencing, protective fencing and retaining walls as necessary.

The Grant of easement was offered to and accepted by the County of Orange and recorded in the official records of Orange County on October 4, 1989. The “Hunt Club” property (i.e., subject property) has not been improved or developed with any of the permitted uses specified in the Grant of Easement; nonetheless, the 127-acre property may be improved as provided by the recorded Grant of Easement. Based on the 15 percent allocation for potential development within the Hunt Club parcel, a total of 19.05 acres of structures could be developed within the limits of the 127-acre property and no limits are placed on how much acreage could be subject to grading or clearing.

### **3.5 Project Phasing**

The proposed project will be implemented in a single phase that includes grading of the seven residential lots and completion of an access road and utilities, which will be extended from Van Gogh Way off-site and west of the property to serve the estate lots are also proposed. Building pads within each estate lot would be created; however, the completion of homes and appurtenant facilities would occur incrementally on a lot-by-lot basis.

### **3.6 Statement of Objectives**

Implementation of the proposed project will achieve the following intended specific objectives, which have been identified by the project applicant.

- Create a land use plan that is consistent with the goals, policies, and objectives of the County of Orange General Plan.
- Create a rural residential neighborhood consistent with the purpose and intent of the Coto de Caza Specific Plan that does not exceed the density allocation for Planning Area 10.
- Provide private and public open space resources that complement the adjoining open space resources.
- Enhance General Plan trail connections linking the Coto de Caza Planning Area 10 trails to the Coto de Caza Specific Plan open space lands to the south, north and west.

- Reduce the intensity of development approved for the subject property as well as the overall intensity currently allowed (i.e., “Hunt Club,” golf course, etc.) in Planning Area 10, and limit Planning Area 10 to rural residential and open space uses only.
- Incorporate development standards, landscaping, and grading techniques to minimize landform alteration and to buffer the proposed development from adjacent properties.
- Stabilize the site’s geologic conditions through remedial grading and similar passive stabilization methods, to the extent deemed feasible by the project geotechnical engineer, as part of the project design.
- Minimize potential visual impacts by siting the proposed residential dwelling units in locations that are not visible from the nearby existing residential development and/or screened from the public trails surrounding the subject development area by intervening topography.
- Create a sustainable residential community that incorporates “Green Building Methods” such as energy efficient design, California native landscaping and water quality features to treat runoff emanating from the site.
- Incorporate contour grading techniques to minimize landform alteration and to balance earthwork quantities on-site to avoid impacts on the nearby residential neighborhoods.

### **3.7 Project Processing Requirements and Requested Entitlements**

Project implementation will necessitate the approval of the following legislative and discretionary actions by the Orange County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors:

- A Specific Plan Amendment to modify a portion of the Planning Area 10 development area to allow residential and open space.
- A Tentative Tract Map to subdivide the 126.51-acre property into 7 lots for development with single-family homes and 6 open space lots.
- Area Plan to implement the Coto de Caza Specific Plan procedures identified in Planning Area 10.
- Amendment to an existing Grant of Easement for Parcel Map 89-107 to update the mutual commitments of the County of Orange and the applicant to change the development intensity from “Hunt Club”/recreation to rural residential and to increase the commitment to habitat preservation in Planning Area 10.